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THE OVERLOOKED DIMENSIONS OF THE CONVENTIONAL BALANCE
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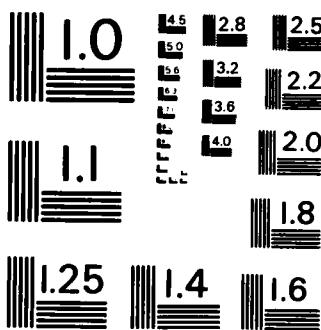
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Robert Shishko

March, 1985

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PREFACE

This paper was presented at the International Studies Association's 26th Annual Convention, which was held March 5-9, 1985 in Washington, DC. It was delivered at the session entitled "A Conventional Defense for Europe" chaired by Ms. Joyce P. Kaufman. The views expressed here are the author's own.

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THE OVERLOOKED DIMENSIONS OF THE CONVENTIONAL BALANCE IN EUROPE

Traditional views of the conventional military balance in the Central Region emphasize a comparison of the number of major weapon systems each side has in its inventory, or of the number of military personnel or formations. These traditional statements of the balance dramatically tend to favor the Warsaw Pact. In this paper, I want to address some of the "overlooked dimensions" in the conventional military balance.

These overlooked dimensions are (1) the reliability of allies, (2) the role of surprise, (3) the contribution of logistic support, and (4) the role of C3I and Electronic Warfare (EW). Of these four, the first two might be called scenario-related variables, while the last two are generally called "force multipliers." The effect each of these might have in wartime is uncertain and not easily factored into the balance analytically. In this paper, I shall give a brief indication of how one might attempt to do so, or what results are generally obtained when those attempts have been made.

THE RELIABILITY OF ALLIES

In spite of recurring examples of resistance to Soviet control in Eastern Europe, current intelligence assessments fail to account for possible non-compliant Non-Soviet Warsaw Pact (NSWP) behaviors. It would not be difficult to imagine circumstances in which less than complete NSWP cooperation would be forthcoming in a Soviet attack against NATO. Encouraging those circumstances ought to be given more attention in the West as a way of strengthening deterrence.

The Soviets, on the other hand, have probably given a great deal of attention to this aspect of coalition warfare, both in terms of attempting to drive a wedge between the U.S. and its NATO allies, as well as in terms of understanding the military difficulties of "going it alone" or with reluctant allies.

Several studies of the command structures of the WP and NATO suggest that the Soviets have taken an approach to ensuring the reliability of allies in wartime that is quite different from NATO's. On the NATO side, and I should include France, it is not so much a matter of who will "show up," but rather one of when and with how much.

To evaluate the military implications of unreliability or dissonance within the Pact, one needs to look at a number of detailed scenario variables. For example, an analyst would have to know what forms NSWP unreliability would take in a particular scenario, and what groups are responsible. Unreliable behavior could range from incompetent compliance on the part of NSWP railroad workers to passive hindrance by the general population to active resistance by NSWP military forces. In addition, an analyst would have to project how the Soviets might react. In particular, what warning of unreliability they might have, what rear area risks they are willing to take, whether timely adjustments in Soviet deployments and employment can be made, and what diversions of Soviet forces would result. Lastly, an analyst would have to take into account all the usual information on Pact readiness states, force generation times, closure processes and times, along with some guesses about the additional delays and losses NSWP unreliability might impose.

All of these detailed scenario variables are highly uncertain. But it is my guess that to be successful in the face of NSWP unreliability, the Soviets must (a) ensure military surprise, (b) guess right on the location of their main attack, and (c) rely more heavily on the good performance of those allies who do participate. All this has got to make a Soviet planner less comfortable.

THE ROLE OF SURPRISE

How much surprise is really possible in an attack against NATO and what are the military implications? A strategic surprise of NATO is not inconsistent with the idea of an attack on NATO following a protracted crisis. Surprise has more to do with NATO's mobilization and deployment responses than it does with how long NATO-WP tensions run high.

In the face of ambiguous signals, NATO is likely to avoid a major mobilization and deployment of forces. One reason is that NATO will not want to antagonize the Pact or to exacerbate a crisis. In 1968, for example, NATO called off exercises in the FRG during the Czech crisis. Another reason is the high cost of mobilization. A large-scale mobilization tends to tie up rail, road, air traffic, and ports, not to mention the potential disruption of financial markets, industrial production, and so on. Politically, Europe could not stay in a mobilized posture for long.

In addition, the Soviets will employ tactical and strategic deception to mask both the preparations for an attack, and exactly when that attack will occur. Although the U.S. is quite good at detecting preparations--that is, mobilization, dispersal, training, uploading, and movement--the Soviets will employ higher level masking. In fact, my worst case scenario centers around a crisis in Poland of the sort that occurred in 1980-81. The Soviets mobilize a number of their high strength cadre divisions in all three Western Military Districts (WMDs), while NATO, assuming that these are to be used to suppress dissension in Poland, fails to act. The Soviet attack then comes with the second strategic echelon several weeks into mobilization. The Polish crisis ironically contributes to a Soviet military success.

What are the estimated military implications of Soviet surprise? The answer tends to depend on which combat simulation model one uses. Generally the more maneuver and bold initiative on the part of "commanders" are allowed and the more OMGs, airborne and air assault forces are played, the more surprise pays off. The most convincing games I have seen--and one must be *very* conscious of the limitations of these games and simulations--suggest that the Soviets face negative marginal returns in allowing NATO to get into its GDP positions and mobilizing and deploying its follow-on forces.¹

¹There is probably an interaction between NSWP unreliability and Pact and NATO mobilization time. The longer that time the more problems the Soviets are likely to face with their allies. Further, the Soviets need to defeat NATO quickly, as a protracted conflict could easily lead to mass NSWP defections.

LOGISTIC SUPPORT

NATO's and the Pact's ability to provide logistic support to its forces, both at the theater and unit levels, should be factored into the conventional balance, but generally isn't. It is also true that the U.S. Army and the Bundesheer (FRG) are perceived as putting more into the support tail than their Soviet counterparts, and that this confers some advantage in a long war scenario.

Although it is often assumed that the U.S. Army is postured for the long war, those support resources are not necessarily balanced. The Army itself has flagged a number of support areas--that is, support units, noncombat equipment, and War Reserve Materiel (WRM)--that have been colorfully dubbed "war stoppers."² Others, notably the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), have also noted that U.S. equipment is becoming less supportable--that is, requiring more highly skilled individuals, more fuel, and more costly spares.³

These support deficiencies are not limited to U.S. forces. Our NATO allies face various "war stoppers,"⁴ and Soviet literature in this area also acknowledges shortcomings. The Soviets have been working hard to overcome these, particularly in the areas of pipeline laying, maintenance, and resupply over roads.

What are the estimated military implications of differences in NATO and Pact logistic support? I don't believe analysis can give a satisfactory answer yet. Just because NATO probably spends more on and puts more manpower into logistic support relative to the Pact, it doesn't follow that the performance of NATO units will be better. This is simply because (1) the logistic functions and missions are different,

²A vigorous Host Nation Support (HNS) can and is helping to alleviate some shortages in U.S. support units.

³Slatkin, Nora, *Army Ground Combat Modernization for the 1980s: Potential Cost and Effects for NATO*, Congressional Budget Office, November 1982, pp. 49-55.

⁴Logistics is a national responsibility within NATO. Consequently, not only are fighting doctrines across national forces different, so are logistics doctrines. This lack of logistic compatibility is compounded by the more widely known RSI (Rationalization, Standardization, Interoperability) problems.

which implies different infrastructure requirements, and (2) doctrine regarding attrition replacement is different. Yet one recent article suggested that we multiply NATO's Armored Division Equivalents (ADEs) by 1.5 to account for NATO's assumed superiority.⁵ I think one needs to be more careful in making such generalizations, but I believe this is a researchable topic in the sense that various models that could shed some light here exist, but have not been exercised.

C3I AND ELECTRONIC WARFARE (EW)

Any student of the current "revolution" in Army doctrine will recognize the growing importance of these two areas. The ability to "see" and understand the battlefield, to distribute the appropriate information to various command levels, and to direct a synchronized response in a timely manner are thought to be the keys to winning the Airland Battle, both now and into the 21st Century (Army 21).⁶ At the same time, each side will seek to disrupt that process and to counter any attempts to do so by the other side. How well each side's C3I/EW systems will perform in wartime is clearly a crucial aspect of the conventional balance.

The importance of C3I/EW in combat is generally confirmed by actual experience in the Falklands (1982) and over Lebanon (1982), but it is difficult to translate that experience to the Central Region. Although we have some idea of what happens in major NATO field exercises when C3I "goes down," we do not have a good picture of what would happen to both sides in wartime.

How is C3I/EW's contribution to winning the battle currently quantified? Past combat simulation models did not give sufficient attention to these areas. It was difficult then to estimate what effect better C3I/EW would have. With the increasing focus on these areas, some newer models have attempted to fix the problems, but with only

⁵ Posen, Barry R., "Measuring the European Conventional Balance," *International Security*, Winter 1984/85 (Vol. 9, No. 3), pp. 47-88.

⁶ For a good history of the Division Restructuring Study (DRS) and the Division 86 Study (DIV86) that led to the Airland Battle doctrine, as well as a brief description of the people involved and new concepts in FM100-5, see Romjue, John L., "The Evolution of the Airland Battle Concept," *Air University Review*, May/June 1984, pp. 4-15.

mixed success. As more analytic resources are devoted to this problem, some new insights will doubtlessly emerge.

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